MEN'S ENGAGEMENT, CHANGING MASCULINITIES AND HOW GENDER-EQUITABLE IDEAS TRAVELLED

INTRODUCTION

People in Need (PIN) is a Czech-founded, non-governmental and non-profit international organisation established in 1992. PIN began working in Nepal as part of the humanitarian response to the April 25, 2015 earthquake. Since then, PIN Nepal has worked to develop and facilitate systemic solutions that respond to the needs of vulnerable and marginalised populations, including people living in geographically remote areas and groups experiencing exclusion based on ethnicity, age, gender, or other social and structural barriers. Its work in Nepal currently spans three strategic pillars: emergency response and recovery, climate resilience, and civil society and inclusive governance. Across these areas, PIN Nepal works through partnerships with civil society organisations, the Government of Nepal, academia, the private sector, and other stakeholders. This partnership-based approach supports locally led solutions that strengthen inclusion, resilience, and access to opportunities and services.

DOES IT REALLY HAVE TO BE THIS WAY?



For many people, gender norms are not rules that are consciously chosen. They are simply everyday routine: who cooks, who earns, who makes decisions, who speaks, who cares for children and what is expected from men and women. Social expectations around masculinity are often learned early: men are expected to be strong, decisive and in control, while care work, household responsibilities and emotional expression are often seen as women's roles. Changing these expectations requires more than telling men to "support women and girls." It requires creating space for men to reflect on what they have learned about being a man and to consider what they might do differently.

Social norm change rarely begins with a visible shift at the community level. It often starts much more quietly with someone questioning something they had always considered normal. For SJP1, one of the starting points was creating space for men and women to talk about gender, power, relationships and GBV through the Gender Transformative Social Norms (GTSN) process. The intention was not simply to give participants information about GBV but to create space to pause and question their own beliefs and everyday relationships. And **this is how the story of change begins.**

The evidence emerging from SJP suggests that these conversations mattered. The change was not always dramatic, and it was certainly not linear. In some cases, it appeared first as a change in understanding. In others, it showed up in a conversation at home, a man taking on household work, or someone finding the confidence to speak when they previously would have remained silent. And sometimes the change was simply that a person began to see an old gender expectation differently.

FROM "WOMEN'S WORK" TO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

One of the clearest areas of change was around household responsibilities. In the men's engagement sessions, participants openly discussed the expectation that domestic work belongs to women. This created space to question what had previously been treated as normal. This was also reflected in the post-evaluation of the focused masculinity sessions. Of the 393 men surveyed, 381 (96.9%) said they were willing to share household chores. Endline findings also suggest that these ideas were visible beyond the direct participants: 78.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that men in their community were sharing household responsibilities more equally, rising to 91.6% among GTSN participants. The significance is not only that men expressed support for equality. Household work is an everyday behaviour, and changes in who cooks, cleans, cares for children or supports other family members can make changing gender expectations visible within families.

> **"Women and girls should have the same level of respect, and we should share household chores."**
>
> GTSN participant (Man), Janakpur

KNOWLEDGE SCORE

39.58% → 64.91%

related to men engagement shared responsibility (pre to post)

ATITUDES AND BELIEF

32.86% → 51.29%

(pre to post)

The GTSN pre/post results provide the clearest starting point. These numbers tell us something important, but they do not tell the whole story. Knowing that GBV is harmful is one thing. Questioning the beliefs and expectations that can sustain unequal relationships is another. The qualitative evidence helps us see what sat behind these changes. Participants began talking about gender roles in more practical terms: who should do household work, who should make decisions, who gets to speak, and what is expected from men and women within a family. For some men, this meant reconsidering roles they had previously taken for granted. **This is where the GTSN approach appears to have created an important opening. Rather than telling men what a "good man" should be, the conversations created room to ask what masculinity looks like in their own lives.** The conversations also began to challenge the idea that masculinity must be associated with toughness, authority or emotional control.

> **“Being a man does not mean shouting or being tough anymore; you can be soft and still be masculine.”**
>
> Change agent (Man), Barahathawa

> **On its own, helping with household work may appear like a small change. But from a gender norms perspective, it can represent something much larger. Household work is often treated as women's responsibility. When a man begins to see it as a shared responsibility, he is not simply changing a task. He is questioning an expectation about what men and women are supposed to do.**

This points to a deeper shift than simply learning about gender equality. Men were beginning to question the expectations placed on them and to recognise that care, respect and emotional openness could also be part of being a man. This matters because sustainable change in masculinities is unlikely to come only from changing what men believe about women. It also requires men to reconsider how they understand themselves, their relationships and their responsibilities.

The changes were also visible in how men supported women and girls within their families. Manisha from Barahathawa described this through the support she received from her husband: “It is because of my husband that I could move forward, open my veil, and continue my studies.” Here, support from a male family member became an enabler of a woman’s education and agency. The emerging role of men was not simply as decision-makers or gatekeepers, but as partners who could help create space for women and girls to make their own choices. Endline findings provide further evidence of this changing perception. **Overall, 87.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that men support girls’ higher education and career growth; among GTSN participants, the figure was 95.7%.**

The change did not remain within the GTSN sessions. It travelled.

Another important change was the willingness to question practices that had previously been accepted as part of tradition.

> **“I used to believe that dowry is a cultural and social rights granted to men. But now, I believe it is a social evil, and malpractice. I have been actively advocating against it.”**
>
> GTSN participant from Simraungadh

This illustrates an important dimension of social norm change: people may begin by questioning an idea that once seemed unquestionable, and then move towards actively challenging it.

SJP identified **85 local influencers and 57 change agents** who helped carry conversations on gender equality, child marriage and social norms into families and communities, a process we call **Community Diffusion.**

The Community Diffusion Assessment also found examples of men taking on household responsibilities despite resistance from people around them. One participant described being told that he was “breaking our culture” by doing work traditionally associated with women, but continued because he felt it was the right thing to do. This is significant because it shows that changing behaviour can sometimes come before wider acceptance. A man may begin doing something differently even when his family, neighbours or wider community have not yet changed their expectations.

91.1%

willing to speak out against GBV than two years earlier

AMONG WHICH

98.1%

are GTSN participants

Source: Endline Survey

Endline findings also suggest a shift in perceptions of men’s willingness to speak out against GBV. Overall, 91.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that men in their community were more willing to speak out against GBV than two years earlier. Among GTSN participants, this was 98.1%. These findings should not be read as proof of community-wide norm transformation. However, taken together with the qualitative evidence, they show a pattern worth learning from: conversations about masculinity were increasingly being connected to visible behaviour, relationships and community action.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING ON MEN'S ENGAGEMENT?

1

Give men space to reflect on themselves:

Men's engagement should not focus only on what men should do for women and girls. It should also create space for men to examine their own experiences, relationships and expectations about masculinity. The deeper shift comes when men begin asking what kind of husband, father, brother, neighbour or community member they want to be.

2

Look for change in everyday life:

Household work, communication, decision-making, support for women's education and willingness to speak out against GBV can provide important signs of changing masculinities. These should be treated as meaningful outcomes, rather than secondary observations after knowledge or attitude change

3

Design for diffusion from the beginning:

Men do not live in isolation from their families and social networks. What they discuss in a session may be taken home and discussed with a partner, family member or friend. Programmes can deliberately support these conversations and recognise participants' social networks as part of the pathway through which change may spread.

4

Expect resistance:

Changing gender expectations can challenge deeply established ideas about what men and women should do. The experience of men being told they were "breaking our culture" shows that resistance can accompany behaviour change. Rather than automatically treating this as programme failure, it can help identify where norms remain particularly strong and where further engagement is needed.

5

Protect early change:

Men who begin behaving differently from those around them may face pressure to conform. Peer support, positive role models and spaces where men can continue reflecting together can help individual changes become more consistent and sustained.

THE STORY WE CAN TELL AND THE STORY WE CANNOT

The available evidence does not allow us to claim that SJP caused community-wide changes in gender norms. The evidence comes from different sources including programme monitoring, post-evaluations, the Community Diffusion Assessment, Outcome Mapping and endline data and men are not equally represented across all of them. Much of the endline evidence is also based on respondents' perceptions and self-reports. Similarly, diffusion should not automatically be interpreted as norm change. People may share messages or adopt individual behaviours without those changes becoming widely accepted or sustained across a community.



Shiva Ram Kushwaha, GTSN trainer and change agent

What the evidence does show is a consistent and useful pattern: some men moved from reflecting on gender expectations to practising different behaviours, and some of these changes became visible within families and communities.

The emerging lesson is that changing masculinities is not a single-step process. It can begin with reflection, become visible through everyday behaviour, encounter resistance, and then spread through relationships and peer networks. The story of change, therefore, is not simply that men learned about gender equality. It is that some men began to imagine a different way of being a man and started to live it.

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